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Up in smoke

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Indiana and Illinois both earned unflattering "F" grades from an American Lung Association report issued Tuesday, and local tobacco prevention advocates say they are not the least bit surprised.

"They have cut back probably 70 percent on the money they put into tobacco control and education," lamented Susan Gleason, program coordinator for Porter County Tobacco Education and Prevention Coalition.

"No, it really doesn't surprise me," said Cynthia Sampson, director of Lake County Tobacco Prevention and Cessation. "We knew starting out that Lake County was going to be a difficult county."

The association's State of Tobacco Control 2005 report, released yesterday, did not reflect well on the two states. Out of four grading categories, both flunked three for an average "F" grade.

Illinois eked out a "C" grade for its cigarette tax of 98 cents. Indiana got a "D" in the same area for its 55.5-cent tax, an increase from 36 cents. The national average cigarette tax is 92 cents.

The two states weren't alone. Most states got "F" grades for at least a category. Maine was the only state to get straight "A" grades.

The report also concluded that Indiana's economic costs related to smoking are nearly \$4 billion, with Illinois at over \$7.2 billion.

Indiana was criticized for the amount it spent on tobacco prevention last year, \$10.8 million. That is just a fraction of the amount recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (\$34.7 million) and the amounts spent by the state at its peak funding (\$32.5 million).

Illinois was condemned for failing to pass legislation that would have boosted the cigarette tax by \$1 per pack and set aside 25 percent of that money for tobacco prevention and cessation programs.

To get better grades, officials say the states need to pass more smoking bans, spend more on prevention and cessation, and keep boosting the cigarette tax.

"I'm hoping in the next few years, we see a big turn around in our grade," said Nancy Turner, president and chief executive officer of the American Lung Association of Indiana. "We need to continue to fight the good fight."

[EXTRAS]

Find out more

To see more details and learn how the association assessed its grades and conclusions, visit the American Lung Association State of Tobacco Control 2005 official site at <http://lungaction.org/reports/tobacco-control05.html>.

To find out more about issues related to youth and tobacco, see

Smoke Screen: The Times Investigates Teen Smoking at nwtimes.com/smoking.